

# Steve Bullock (American politician)

**Stephen Clark Bullock** (born April 11, 1966) is an American politician and lawyer serving as the 24th and current governor of Montana since 2013. He is a member of the Democratic Party.

Born in Missoula, Montana, Bullock graduated from Claremont McKenna College and Columbia Law School. He began his career working as legal counsel to the Secretary of State of Montana before becoming the Executive Assistant Attorney General and acting Chief Deputy Attorney General of Montana. Bullock then entered private practice as a lawyer for Steptoe & Johnson. He was an adjunct professor at George Washington University Law School before opening his own law firm upon returning to Montana. In 2008, Bullock was elected Attorney General of Montana, and he served one term from 2009 to 2013.

Bullock declared his candidacy for governor of Montana on September 7, 2011. The seat was open in 2012, as incumbent Governor Brian Schweitzer, a Democrat, could not seek reelection due to term limits. Bullock won the Democratic primary with 87% of the vote and defeated Republican nominee Rick Hill in the general election with 48.9% of the vote. In 2016, Bullock was reelected with 50.2% of the vote, defeating Republican nominee Greg Gianforte.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

Bullock chaired the National Governors Association from 2018 to 2019.<sup>[4][5]</sup> He was a Democratic candidate for President of the United States in 2020.<sup>[6]</sup> After suspending his presidential campaign, he announced his candidacy for the United States Senate in the 2020 election.<sup>[7]</sup>

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### Steve Bullock



Bullock in 2019

#### 24th Governor of Montana

##### Incumbent

##### Assumed office

January 7, 2013

**Lieutenant** John Walsh  
Angela McLean  
Mike Cooney

**Preceded by** Brian Schweitzer

#### Chair of the National Governors Association

##### In office

July 21, 2018 – July 26, 2019

**Deputy** Larry Hogan

**Preceded by** Brian Sandoval

**Succeeded by** Larry Hogan

#### 23rd Attorney General of Montana

##### In office

January 5, 2009 – January 7, 2013


**Governor** Brian Schweitzer

**Preceded by** Mike McGrath

**Succeeded by** Tim Fox

##### Personal details

**Born** Stephen Clark Bullock  
April 11, 1966

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## Early life, education, and law career

Bullock was born in Missoula, Montana, and raised in Helena, the state capital. He is the son of Penny Clark, a school board trustee, and Mike Bullock, a teacher and administrator.<sup>[8]</sup> Bullock attended Helena High School where he met his wife and graduated in 1984.<sup>[9]</sup> His parents divorced when he was in grade school.<sup>[10]</sup> Bullock received his B.A. degree in politics, philosophy, and economics from Claremont McKenna College and his J.D. degree with honors from Columbia Law School in New York.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

In 1996, Bullock served as chief legal counsel to Montana Secretary of State Mike Cooney. He went on to work for four years with the Montana Department of Justice under Attorney General Joe Mazurek, first as executive assistant attorney general, and later as acting chief deputy (1997–2001).<sup>[13]</sup> During this time, he also served as legislative director, coordinating the Attorney General's legislative efforts.

He was unsuccessful in his first race for Montana Attorney General, losing the 2000 Democratic primary to Mike McGrath, who went on to be elected Attorney General that year and now serves as Chief Justice of the Montana Supreme Court.<sup>[14]</sup> From 2001 to 2004, Bullock practiced law with Steptoe & Johnson in Washington, D.C., where he also served as an adjunct professor at George Washington University Law School. He returned to Montana in 2004, working in private practice in Helena.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Attorney General of Montana

Bullock was the Democratic nominee for Attorney General in 2008, defeating two other candidates in the June primary election. He went on to win the contested general election race with 52.64% of the vote against Republican Tim Fox. Bullock received 245,669 votes, more than either other candidate.<sup>[15]</sup> Under Bullock, the Attorney General's office initiated the 24/7 Sobriety Program which requires repeat DUI offenders to take daily alcohol tests.<sup>[16]</sup>

The Attorney General's office also pursued the railroad industry for monopolistic business practices<sup>[17][18]</sup> and took part in a 16 state effort to urge the federal government to use antitrust authority against consolidation in agriculture.<sup>[19]</sup> Bullock focused on the misclassification of employees as independent contractors and allowing FedEx to avoid paying millions in state taxes and fees. His efforts resulted in changes by FedEx to comply with federal and state laws.<sup>[20]</sup>

Bullock attracted national attention by challenging the *Citizens United* decision through his defense of Montana's 100-year-old ban on corporate campaign expenditures.<sup>[21]</sup> After winning in the Montana Supreme Court, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the State of Montana in a 5–4 decision.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

Bullock, who authored the state's opinion guaranteeing access to rivers, streams, and public lands, worked with the legislature and Governor Brian Schweitzer to codify the access opinion into law.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Governor of Montana

## Elections

On September 7, 2011, Bullock announced his candidacy for governor of Montana in 2012.<sup>[25]</sup> In the Democratic primary, he faced Helena resident Heather Margolis. Bullock won with 87% of the vote.<sup>[26]</sup>

Bullock's running mate was John Walsh, the former Adjutant General of the Montana National Guard.<sup>[27]</sup>

Bullock pledged to give Montana homeowners a one-time \$400 property tax rebate to refund a portion of the state's \$400 million budget surplus.<sup>[28][29]</sup> The proposal became a bill in 2013 but died in committee.<sup>[30]</sup>

Bullock won the November 6 election, defeating former Republican Congressman Rick Hill<sup>[31]</sup> with 48.9% of the vote to Hill's 47.3%. Libertarian candidate Ron Vandevender received 3.8%.<sup>[32]</sup>



Bullock at a campaign event in Glasgow, Montana, October 31, 2012.

## First term

Bullock and Walsh were sworn in on January 7, 2013.<sup>[33]</sup> Bullock later appointed Walsh to become the new Senator from Montana to replace Max Baucus, who had been appointed Ambassador to China. Bullock then appointed Angela McLean to replace Walsh as lieutenant governor. In November 2015, McLean announced her resignation as lieutenant governor, effective upon the appointment of her successor, in order to accept the position of director of American Indian and minority achievement in the office of the state commissioner of higher education.<sup>[34]</sup> In December 2015, Bullock announced the appointment of Mike Cooney as McLean's replacement. Cooney was sworn in on January 4, 2016.<sup>[35]</sup> According to a September 20, 2016, survey by *Morning Consult*, Bullock, with a 66% approval rating and a 19% disapproval rating, was the most popular Democratic governor in the United States, as well as the fourth-most popular overall, behind Republicans Dennis Daugaard of South Dakota, Larry Hogan of Maryland, and Charlie Baker of Massachusetts.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Second term

Bullock began his second term on January 2, 2017, alongside Lieutenant Governor Cooney.<sup>[37]</sup> Bullock and Cooney were the only two Democrats to retain statewide offices in the 2016 elections as the Republicans captured the offices of Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction, Montana State Auditor, and Montana Secretary of State and held onto the offices of Montana Attorney General and U.S. Representative for Montana's at-large congressional district.<sup>[38]</sup> Following the 2016 elections, Bullock faced large Republican majorities in the Montana Legislature. Republicans gained three State Senate seats and widened their Senate majority over the Democrats to 32-18 while maintaining a 59-41 majority in the Montana House of Representatives, the same as in 2015.<sup>[38]</sup>

In the 2018 state legislative elections in Montana, Democrats won 42 of 100 seats in the Montana House of Representatives and gained two seats in the Montana Senate.<sup>[39]</sup> This meant that, in the 2019 state legislative session that Bullock presided over, Republicans held 60% of the seats in the upper chamber and 58% in the lower chamber of the legislature.<sup>[40]</sup>

## COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bullock created a task force on March 3, 2020, declared a state of emergency on March 12, and closed public schools March 15.<sup>[41]</sup> He issued a stay-at-home order on March 26; earlier that day, the Montana Hospital Association requested such an order.<sup>[41][42]</sup> The order was described as having been implemented early in the pandemic<sup>[43]</sup> and before many other states.<sup>[42]</sup> In July, Bullock issued a statewide face mask mandate for indoor public places and large outdoor gatherings.<sup>[44][45]</sup> In August, he gave county election officials permission to implement all-mail-in voting if they choose.<sup>[46]</sup>

## 2020 presidential campaign

In 2017 Bullock formed the Big Sky Values PAC, which by spring 2019 had raised nearly \$1.8 million, to pay for travel around the United States.<sup>[47]</sup> On May 14, 2019, Bullock announced his candidacy for the 2020 presidential election.<sup>[48]</sup> In his announcement video, Bullock said that opposing political "dark money" and legislating against the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling would be among his utmost priorities.<sup>[49]</sup> Based on his three statewide electoral victories in a largely rural state, Bullock held a certain cachet of "electability", and appeared to have a plausible path to the nomination.<sup>[50]</sup> His mid-May entrance was relatively late, but he was still able to qualify for the second Democratic debate in July.<sup>[51]</sup> Even so, the late start left him with less media exposure than his numerous rivals: he found it hard to raise funds, and never rose above 1% in nationwide polls.<sup>[51]</sup> He ended his campaign on December 2, 2019.<sup>[52]</sup>



Bullock speaking at the 2019 Des Moines Register Soapbox at the Iowa State Fair.



Bullock's 2020 presidential campaign logo

## 2020 Senate campaign

On March 4, 2020, after months of speculation and denials from Bullock himself, *The New York Times* reported that Bullock would enter Montana's U.S. Senate election to challenge Republican incumbent Steve Daines. The move came after Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) flew to Montana to persuade Bullock to run and after Bullock talked with former president Barack Obama.<sup>[53]</sup> Both believed that he was the only formidable candidate against Daines.<sup>[54]</sup> Bullock is running for the seat formerly held for six terms by Democrat Max Baucus.<sup>[55]</sup>

Bullock officially declared his candidacy on March 9, 2020, the last day to file.<sup>[56]</sup> The announcement prompted all other candidates for the Democratic nomination except one to drop out and endorse Bullock. This included the mayor of Helena, Wilmot Collins.<sup>[57][58][59][60]</sup> On June 2, 2020, Bullock won the Democratic primary with 94.8% of the vote, to challenger John Mues's 2.8%.

## Political positions

Bullock has been described by *The Washington Post* and *ABC News* as a moderate Democrat.<sup>[61][62][42]</sup> *The New York Times* referred to Bullock as being among centrist Democratic governors.<sup>[63]</sup> The nonpartisan organization *On The Issues*, which tracks candidates' positions and records, considers Bullock a "Liberal."<sup>[64]</sup>

### Abortion

Bullock is pro-choice.<sup>[65]</sup> During the 2017 state legislative session, he vetoed two bills (SB 282, SB 329) aimed at restricting late-term abortions.<sup>[66][67]</sup> Bullock received a 100% rating from NARAL in 2013<sup>[68]</sup> and was endorsed by Planned Parenthood Advocates of Montana in his 2016 reelection bid.<sup>[69]</sup>

Bullock was one of 14 Democratic governors to write a letter to Alex Azar, President Trump's Secretary of Health and Human Services, on March 31, 2018, demanding that Title X funding for women's reproductive health care and family planning remain in effect. The 14 governors threatened legal action if the Trump administration undermined women's access to reproductive health care.<sup>[70]</sup>

### Campaign finance reform

As Attorney General of Montana, Bullock advocated on behalf of the state's century-old ban on corporate money in elections, the Montana Corrupt Practices Act of 1912. After that and similar laws were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010, Bullock countered with a new case, *American Tradition*

*Partnership, Inc. v. Bullock* (2012). The Supreme Court disposed of the case in a 5–4 decision.<sup>[71]</sup> but Bullock continued to advocate for campaign finance reform throughout his time as governor of Montana.<sup>[72][73]</sup>

In 2015, Bullock steered the DISCLOSE Act, a bipartisan campaign finance reform bill that bolstered disclosure requirements in Montana elections, through a GOP-controlled state legislature.<sup>[72][74]</sup>

In June 2018, Bullock signed an executive order that required the recipients of major government contracts in Montana to disclose "dark money spending" in elections, including spending disclosure not explicitly required by federal law.<sup>[75]</sup>

On July 24, 2018, Bullock sued the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Department of the Treasury<sup>[76]</sup> over a recent decision to dispense with donor requirements for nonprofit organizations.<sup>[77]</sup>

## Climate change and environment

Bullock believes that climate change is real and that humans contribute to it.<sup>[78][79]</sup> Montana became the first state to halt preparations for the Clean Power Plan when the United States Supreme Court announced a stay of the plan in February 2016.<sup>[79]</sup>

In September 2014, Bullock signed an executive order creating a habitat conservation plan for sage-grouse in a bid to keep management of the imperiled bird in state hands rather than see it come under federal Endangered Species Act protection. The government said to the press: "Montanans recognize that it is in the best interest of our state, its economy and our quality of life to maintain state management of the greater sage-grouse."<sup>[80]</sup>

## Democratic Party

Bullock endorsed Hillary Clinton in the 2016 general election but expressed disagreement with Clinton's opposition to coal mining because it is an important industry in Montana. He did not attend the 2016 Democratic National Convention, citing his duties as governor.<sup>[81]</sup> Bullock stayed neutral during the 2016 Democratic Party presidential primaries.<sup>[82]</sup>

Bullock was chairman of the Democratic Governors Association in 2015, overseeing the election of Governor John Bel Edwards of Louisiana.<sup>[83]</sup> In 2015, Bullock said that there are "roles for all of us [Democrats]" within the party, referring to liberal, moderate, and conservative Democrats alike.<sup>[84]</sup>

Bullock was one of just three Democrats to win gubernatorial elections in 2016 in states that President Trump carried that year (one of whom, Jim Justice, is now a Republican), and the only incumbent Democratic governor to win reelection in a state Trump carried.<sup>[85]</sup>

Since the 2016 elections, in which Democrats lost the presidency, ceded control of several governorships, and came short of winning majorities in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, Bullock has publicly argued that the Democratic Party needs to expand its reach beyond urban areas and the coasts. He has encouraged Democrats to engage with and attempt to persuade voters in suburban and rural areas rather than relying solely on base turnout.<sup>[86][87]</sup> He visited Iowa,<sup>[88]</sup> Wisconsin,<sup>[89]</sup> and Colorado<sup>[90]</sup> to campaign for and speak in support of Democratic candidates during the 2018 election cycle, which saw Democrats retake the majority in the U.S. House and gain governorships and state legislature seats. Bullock's visits around the country led some to speculate that he was considering a run for president of the United States, which turned out to be true.<sup>[91]</sup>

## Death penalty

In 2019, Bullock said he supports the death penalty in "limited circumstances" like terrorism—a stance that distinguished him from the crowded 2020 Democratic presidential field.<sup>[92]</sup>

## Gun control

During his run for governor in 2016, Bullock opposed gun control and universal background checks and said that as governor "our Second Amendment rights have been expanded in Montana."<sup>[93]</sup> In 2018, he changed his positions to support universal background checks, limits on magazine sizes, temporary removal of firearms from potentially violent people (red flag laws), and banning certain types of "semiautomatic weapons."<sup>[93]</sup>

## Health care

Bullock expanded Medicaid coverage in Montana under the Affordable Care Act with a Republican-dominated state legislature. He is in favor of expanding accessibility to healthcare and trying to protect, improve, and strengthen the Affordable Care Act and does not favor a single-payer system.<sup>[63][93][94]</sup>

## Immigration

Then-Attorney General Bullock opposed a 2012 voter-approved law in Montana, *Legislative Referendum 121*, that would have required state agencies to verify through a federal database whether individuals requesting certain services were U.S. citizens, which passed with over 80% support.<sup>[95]</sup> The law, which had been intended to deny government jobs and assistance to undocumented immigrants, was ruled unconstitutional and legally unenforceable.<sup>[95][96]</sup>

Despite pushback from Republican state legislators, Bullock supported allowing Syrian refugees to settle in Montana in 2015, but promised that ensuring the safety of Montanans would be his "top priority" during the resettlement process.<sup>[97]</sup> At least 31 other governors at the time opposed the resettlement of Syrian refugees.<sup>[97]</sup>

Bullock supports the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and signed a letter on September 7, 2017, alongside 10 other governors to congressional leaders in support of legislation that would protect DACA recipients and "take immediate action to ensure that these young people can continue to live, work, and contribute to the country they have called home for most of their lives."<sup>[98]</sup>

On April 5, 2018, Bullock refused to deploy National Guard troops from Montana to the Mexican border "based simply on the whim of the President's morning Twitter habit."<sup>[99]</sup> In June 2018, he voiced strong opposition to the Trump administration's policy of family separations at the Mexican border, saying, "As a governor and a father, I'm disgusted. I don't care if it's the President or Congress—these atrocities must end immediately."<sup>[100]</sup>

## LGBT rights

Bullock supports same-sex marriage and praised the federal judge who struck down Montana's same-sex marriage ban in 2014, making Montana the 34th U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>[101]</sup> He also supported the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, and said in a statement on June 26, 2015: "This ruling protects the right of all Montanans to marry the person they love, and moves our state and nation closer to the promise of freedom, dignity, and equality that they were founded upon. All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, should have the opportunity to make a good life for themselves and their families."<sup>[102]</sup> Bullock has also spoken at Pride rallies in Montana<sup>[103][104]</sup> and in 2015 became the first sitting governor in Montana history to officiate a same-sex wedding.<sup>[105]</sup>

In 2016, Bullock enacted an executive order that prohibits state agencies, state contractors, and subcontractors from discriminating in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>[106]</sup> The executive order expanded upon one signed by Governor Brian Schweitzer in 2008, which had similar goals but did not include protections for gender identity and did not apply to contractors or subcontractors.<sup>[107]</sup>

## Net neutrality

Bullock supports net neutrality and opposed the Federal Communications Commission's decision to repeal it.<sup>[108]</sup> On January 22, 2018, Bullock signed an executive order prohibiting any internet service provider with a state government contract from blocking or charging additional fees for faster delivery of websites, two major principles of net neutrality.<sup>[109]</sup> Through this executive order, Montana became the first state to implement and enforce net neutrality after the FCC repeal.<sup>[110]</sup> The governors of New York,<sup>[111]</sup> New Jersey,<sup>[112]</sup> Vermont,<sup>[113]</sup> Hawaii,<sup>[114]</sup> and Rhode Island<sup>[115]</sup> eventually followed suit.

## Organized labor

Bullock has been recognized and endorsed by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO)<sup>[116]</sup> and the Montana Education Association - Montana Federation of Teachers<sup>[117]</sup> for his support of worker's rights and public education.

Bullock opposes right-to-work legislation,<sup>[118]</sup> which allows workers to forgo paying union dues while still benefitting from union-negotiated labor contracts.<sup>[119]</sup> Montana is the only state in the Upper Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. that does not have right-to-work legislation in place; its neighboring states do not provide the same level of protection for labor unions.<sup>[118]</sup>

On January 18, 2018, Bullock filed an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of allowing labor unions to make "agency fees" mandatory.<sup>[120]</sup> He opposed the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* and said in a statement: "The US Supreme Court just overturned 40 years of settled law that workers, employers and unions across the country rely on. All the more ironic, the 5–4 decision cited *Citizens United* as a reason to do so."<sup>[121]</sup>

## Electoral history

## See also

- Dark Money* (film)

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## External links

- Governor Steve Bullock (<http://governor.mt.gov/>) official government website
- Steve Bullock for U.S. Senate (<https://stevebullock.com/>) campaign website
- Steve Bullock ([https://curlie.org/Regional/North\\_America/United\\_States/Montana/Government/Executive/Governor\\_Steve\\_Bullock](https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Montana/Government/Executive/Governor_Steve_Bullock)) at Curlie
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- Profile (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/110899>) at Vote Smart
- Financial information (federal office) (<https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/S0MT00173>) at the Federal Election Commission
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?stevebullock02>) on C-SPAN

Legal offices		
Preceded by <b>Mike McGrath</b>	<b>Attorney General of Montana</b> 2009–2013	Succeeded by <b>Tim Fox</b>
Party political offices		
Preceded by <b>Brian Schweitzer</b>	<b>Democratic nominee for Governor of Montana</b> 2012, 2016	Succeeded by <b>Mike Cooney</b>
Preceded by <b>Peter Shumlin</b>	<b>Chair of the Democratic Governors Association</b> 2014–2015	Succeeded by <b>Dan Malloy</b>
Preceded by <b>Amanda Curtis</b>	<b>Democratic nominee for U.S. Senator from Montana (Class 2)</b> 2020	<b>Most recent</b>
Political offices		
Preceded by <b>Brian Schweitzer</b>	<b>Governor of Montana</b> 2013–present	<b>Incumbent</b>
Preceded by <b>Brian Sandoval</b>	<b>Chair of the National Governors Association</b> 2018–2019	Succeeded by <b>Larry Hogan</b>
U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)		
Preceded by <b>Mike Pence</b> <i>as Vice President</i>	<b>Order of Precedence of the United States</b> Within Montana	Succeeded by <b>Mayor of city in which event is held</b>
		Succeeded by <b>Otherwise Nancy Pelosi</b> <i>as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
Preceded by <b>Kristi Noem</b> <i>as Governor of South Dakota</i>	<b>Order of Precedence of the United States</b> Outside Montana	Succeeded by <b>Jay Inslee</b> <i>as Governor of Washington</i>



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